Washington State Patrol
Media Release

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Auto Theft is Dangerous

Chief Lowell Porter announced today the results of a 2003 study that indicates that auto theft, which is classified as a "property crime," equates to danger to the public. WSP pursuit data collected for the year 2003 revealed that WSP troopers were involved in 374 pursuits. Of those 374 pursuits, 70 (or 18.7%) involved stolen vehicles. 45.7% of the 70 stolen vehicle pursuits resulted in collisions involving property damage or injury.

According to the most recent nationwide stolen vehicle statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Washington State auto theft rate is 4th in the nation with 667 vehicles stolen per 100,000 inhabitants. This rate is 64% higher than the national average. The monetary loss to Washington residents and businesses was a staggering $273 million in 2003.

During 2003, in Washington State, law enforcement agencies submitted 34,722 stolen vehicle reports to the Washington Crime Information Center (WACIC). In 2003, Washington State averaged 95 vehicles stolen each day. However, there is some good news. Through February 2004, 5,655 vehicles have been reported stolen to WACIC, which is a 5.4% decrease compared to the same period in 2003.

"Auto theft is not only costly, but also increases the danger to the motoring public. We all need to make the reduction of this crime a priority," stated Chief Porter.

The State Patrol, in a continued effort to reduce the auto theft problem, has three regional auto theft units consisting of three detective sergeants and 13 detectives along with 17 VIN specialists and one VIN sergeant. These auto theft units are located in Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane. The VIN inspection stations are located Bellevue, Tacoma, Bremerton, Vancouver, Yakima, Spokane, Marysville, and Wenatchee along with some part-time stations in rural locations throughout the state. These teams are assigned statewide and work in partnership with city, county, and federal agencies.

In 2003, State Patrol auto theft and VIN units arrested 132 auto thieves and recovered 543 vehicles with a value of over $4.9 million. Through February 2004, the units have arrested 35 auto thieves and recovered 97 vehicles valued over $700,000.

The State Patrol recommends the public utilize anti-theft measures to help law enforcement combat this crime. "There are several measures vehicle owners can take to decrease the likelihood of their vehicle being stolen, such as parking in secure, well-lit areas with the keys removed and the doors locked," said Porter.

Additional information on auto theft in Washington State is available on the Washington State Patrol Web site at http://www.wsp.wa.gov/ or the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chief's Web site at http://www.waspc.org/.

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